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The Rigged System and the Real Economy: Corbynism, Antisemitism and Productivist Critiques of Capitalism

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Abstract

This chapter surveys the theoretical roots of the antisemitism crisis associated with the British Labour Party since Jeremy Corbyn's accession to power in 2015, specifically with reference to the notion of capitalism as a 'rigged system' imposed by the unproductive on the productive. Drawing on heterodox Marxian critical theory, the chapter suggests that this notion can create an environment where antisemitic perspectives are legitimated. It concludes that 'truncated' or 'personalised' critiques of capitalism block a properly critical and historical analysis of capitalist social relations, and thus fail to come to terms with the current transformations in capitalist society, with dangerous consequences for left politics in an age of authoritarian nationalism.

Introduction

This chapter examines the ongoing antisemitism crisis that has ripped through the British Labour Party in the period between Jeremy Corbyn's accession to the leadership in 2015, and, at the time of writing, his likely departure after Labour's disastrous showing in the 2019 General Election.¹ Antisemitism in the Labour Party, we suggest, has its roots in a worldview which has, in different forms, dominated socialist and leftist discourse for more than a century. Here capitalism is understood as a set of inequitable property relations and political structures imposed by capitalists on a system of production which would otherwise work for the benefit of all. This is by no means the only way in which socialists and leftists comprehend and seek to challenge capitalism – alternative forms of anticapitalist critique are available, such as that proposed here. However, it is the one with the most purchase on the contemporary left gathered around the Corbynist political project and must be confronted on this basis. As Corbyn himself routinely puts it, productive society has been 'rigged' by

¹ The chapter was initially presented at 'Global perspectives on racism, antisemitism and nationalism', the Mid-Term Conference of European Sociological Association Research Network 31 on Ethnic Relations, Racism and Antisemitism, 5-6 September 2018, University of Ferrara

powerful interests, particularly those in the 'unproductive' banking and financial sectors, to ensure they benefit at the expense of productive workers. The chapter traces the theoretical and historical origins of the notion of capitalism as a 'rigged system' imposed by the unproductive on the productive, arguing that while such a conception is commonly attributed to Marx, the core of the latter's work was precisely aimed at combatting such simplistic and potentially conspiratorial depictions.

Drawing on the work of heterodox Marxian critical theorists such as Moishe Postone, the chapter suggests that the notion of capitalism as a 'rigged system' imposed by a minority of wealth extractors on 'the many' carries potentially troubling resonances.² Pushed to its limits, such a depiction can nurture the development of an antisemitic worldview. This is particularly so when it is combined with a Manichean 'anti-imperialist' politics that attributes all that is wrong with the world to the actions of the USA and the very existence of Israel, and thus offers support to, and seeks to build political alliances with, any movement which claims to oppose 'the imperialists,' regardless of that movement's own reactionary political, social and, in some cases, antisemitic character.

The chapter does not suggest that such a perspective *necessarily* or *inevitably* leads to antisemitic ideas. Nor does it argue that the existence of modern antisemitism can be explained entirely by this way of grasping capitalist society. Rather, the chapter argues that where antisemitism does exist on the left, those espousing it invariably adhere to this kind of Manichean analysis. Thus the chapter argues that when a political movement such as Corbynism is built around the notion of an all-powerful elite extracting wealth from an innocent productive people, or a 'two campist' form of geopolitical analysis in which 'my enemy's enemy is my friend,' the potential is there to create an environment where antisemitic perspectives are legitimated.

Moreover such 'truncated' or 'personalised' critiques of capitalism actually block a properly critical and historical analysis of capitalist social relations, and thus fail to come to terms with the current transformations in capitalist society, with dangerous consequences for leftist movements. Whilst we do not seek to posit a simplistic 'horseshoe' resemblance between left and right, leftist narratives which present the problems of contemporary capitalist society as being the result of malicious activity from outsiders, rather than recognising that they stem from the *internal* dynamic of that society, can end up strengthening, rather than challenging, the arguments of authoritarian nationalist movements. This risk is intensified when the promises of 'derigging' the system are not fulfilled by left governments – failures which, we suggest, cannot be simply explained by betrayal or personal dereliction from political leaders, but rather are the result of the pressures imposed by the continued mediation of society by the categories of labour, money and commodities.

² Cf. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Moishe Postone, 'History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism,' *Public Culture*, 18.1, Winter 2006

The Rigged System

At the end of 2016, with his leadership of the Labour Party floundering, it was reported that Jeremy Corbyn intended to take inspiration from the newly-elected US President Donald Trump, and cast 'himself as the leader of a populist, anti-establishment movement.' Corbyn's team intended to mimic 'the U.S. president-elect's aggression against mainstream TV networks and newspapers' in order to 'whip up support among those already distrustful of the media,' and draw attention to Corbyn's forty year political career 'taking on the establishment'.³ The fruits of this new strategy were soon apparent in Corbyn's speeches, in which he began to denounce British capitalism as a 'rigged system' - a phrase Trump had placed at the centre of his Presidential campaign, having himself taken it from the leftist Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders.

Corbyn argued that this system had been 'set up by the wealth extractors for the wealth extractors,' and pinned the blame for Britain's travails on a 'morally bankrupt' elite who 'extract wealth from the pockets of ordinary working people' by means of a corrupt 'racket.' Only a Corbyn government would 'take on the cosy cartels that are hoarding this country's wealth for themselves', he said.⁴ Over time, the 'rigged system' trope, in which a unified, productive community of 'ordinary working people' is pitted against a corrupt and unproductive 'elite', was honed into Corbyn's rhetorical weapon of choice. It is often accompanied by paeans to 'the many,' whose victory over a parasitic and nefarious 'few' will be assured by a Labour election win. This creation of a division between a productive 'us' and a morally-compromised 'them' is the *sine qua non* of populist politics, on both right and left, and it has borne significant electoral fruit.⁵ Defying predictions of a historic wipe-out, Corbyn's Labour won 40 per cent of the vote in the 2017 election.

There is no doubt that populist rhetoric against 'elites' in the name of 'the people' makes for effective campaign sloganeering. But the 'rigged system' conceit is not just a neat rhetorical trick temporarily adopted for electoral gain, but rather constitutes a theoretical and conceptual lens through which parts of both the left and right - in different but related ways, and with varying outcomes - view the dynamic of contemporary capitalist society. In this respect, and as we have argued elsewhere, what might broadly be labelled 'Corbynism' is the contemporary expression - or condensation - of a particular understanding of capitalism and class which has a long and in many ways politically fruitful history amongst the left.⁶

Here capitalism is portrayed as a system of production in which the working class produces all the wealth of the world by virtue of labour's status as the determinate factor in the production of wealth, and a capitalist class steals it. In this account, the capitalist class's ownership of the means of production and distribution through the

³ Tom Mctague and Charlie Cooper, 'Jeremy Corbyn's Plan to Copy Trump's Playbook', *Politico*, 9 January 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/revealed-jeremy-corbyn-labour-plan-to-copy-donald-trump-playbook> [Accessed 13 May 2018]

⁴ Jeremy Corbyn, "It is a rigged system": Jeremy Corbyn's launch speech – in full, *Independent*, 20 April 2017, <https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/rigged-system-jeremy-corbyns-launch-speech-full> [Accessed 13 May 2018]

⁵ Cf. Jan-Werner Muller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

⁶ Matt Bolton and Frederick Harry Pitts, *Corbynism: A Critical Approach* (Bingley: Emerald, 2018)

market means that they can ensure that production is aimed primarily at making profit, rather than serving the needs of society. In its classical rendition, in the face of this theft of what is rightfully theirs the proletariat, the workers, are given the historic task of overthrowing the limits on production imposed by the capitalist order, and thus instantiate communism. A socialist society is thus understood to be one in which workers take control of production so that they can keep all the wealth they produce, and direct production to fulfil their own democratically-determined needs, rather than the greed of the capitalists. As Labour's 2017 '#WeDemand' election video put it, socialism is a form of productive society no longer 'subject to grand profiteering, but planned, transparent, executed in efficient fashion under democratic control.'⁷

The critique we put forward in this chapter stems from a fundamentally different understanding of capitalism to that outlined above, influenced by a strand of Marxist thought centring on a quite contrary reading of the character and consequences of Marx's critique of political economy.⁸ In this view, capitalism is not a monolithic system consciously designed and covertly imposed by one group – be it the 'capitalist class,' the 'bourgeoisie' or the 'elite' – upon another – whether 'workers' or 'the people.' To 'personalise' capitalism in this way, by seeking to blame supposedly exceptionally greedy, immoral or corrupt individuals or groups for the suffering caused by capitalist society is to fail to grasp, precisely, what is meant by capitalist *society*. A *social*, rather than individualistic, critique of capitalism is one which recognises that capitalism is a specific historical set of human social relations, centred around the production of wealth as the peculiar form of 'value.' Value is not a physical entity, somehow inserted into objects by workers in production. Rather value exists as a social relation *between* objects, which is validated as such at the moment those objects are successfully exchanged with one another. The drive to produce objects which can be validated as value-bearing through the form of monetary exchange, and thus provide access to all the things needed to reproduce life, compels everyone – rich and poor, capitalist and worker – to behave in certain ways in order to survive, even whilst one group benefits at the other's expense. Companies have to compete to make a profit in order to avoid going bankrupt. This is a compulsion, not a choice. Workers have to go to work in order to earn a wage to buy the things they need. We have no other option.

There is no doubt that the former enjoy a better time of it than the latter. Indeed, inequality – in Marxist terms, the result of the capitalist's exploitation of the worker – is an unavoidable consequence of the way capitalist labour is organised. But exploitation is categorically not a moral failing on behalf of a business owner, or a form of robbery. It is systemic. Even the nicest, fairest capitalist exploits their workers. But capitalism is more than mere exploitation – indeed it is more than private property, or the market itself. The compulsion to continually produce value is beyond the control of any individual or institution, no matter how much money or power they have, and has a dynamic of its own which constantly forces both capitalists and workers adapt to its changing demands at a given time in order to survive. As Marx put it, capital is an

⁷ Official Jeremy Corbyn Channel, '#WeDemand', *Youtube*, 2 June 2017.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28-fC6_Byu0 [Accessed 28 April 2018]

⁸ Perhaps the clearest articulation of the key differences between the contemporary 'New Reading of Marx' from which we draw our analysis and that of 'traditional' or 'worldview' orthodox Marxism(s) is to be found in Ingo Elbe, 'Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms – Ways of Reading Marx's Theory,' *Viewpoint*, 21 October 2013, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/10/21/between-marx-marxism-and-marxisms-ways-of-reading-marxs-theory/> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

intangible yet mighty 'social process that goes on behind the backs' of those who live under its sway.⁹

As such, the shifting and potentially antagonistic relationship between 'real' tangible production and the abstract money-making of the finance and banking sectors itself must be seen as symptomatic of the development of the capital relation as a whole – it is an effect, rather than a cause. 'Real' production under capitalism is aimed at the production of value, rather than the satisfaction of needs – but the satisfaction of needs is dependent upon the continued production of value. The necessity of making profit is not a result of the hijacking of 'real' production by unproductive finance, but is rather the basis of that production. The two cannot be separated via the salvaging of the 'good' or 'concrete' side of capitalist social relations from the 'bad' or 'abstract' side. This remains the case even if a 'workers' state' abolishes private production and the market, taking over full responsibility for the production and distribution of goods.¹⁰

In this sense, while not denying the role of individual, group or state activity, we do not think that the transformation, crisis and misery of capitalist development can be explained merely by reference to individuals, groups or states maliciously intervening in a system of production which would otherwise function smoothly. Rather these actions must be placed in the context of the dynamic of capital as a whole, out of the control of any particular actor, group or state. Poverty, inequality and crises are the result of the internal contradictions of this form of society, rather than external impositions.

This is not to say that there are not better or worse ways of managing these problems. It is merely to recognise that the problems themselves are not in essence the product of the secretive machinations of malevolent outsiders. As we shall see, were capitalism really the conspiracy some leftists claim it is, it would be a lot simpler to confront. The left faces the uncomfortable reality that capitalism as it really exists is a system of abstract economic compulsions far harder to overcome than simply through the keeping of a ledger book of guilty parties to prosecute when the revolution comes. In the face of this reality the persistence of personalising critiques of capitalism is really a sign of a state of historical defeat within which many are happy to wallow, and of the failure of the left to produce any compelling, viable or meaningful alternative to the present state of things.

Productivism left and right

The rigged system is part of a wider productivist critique of capitalism that has attained a politically ambivalent status across a broad swathe of post-crisis political and social movements, spanning populists left and right and the contentious politics of the likes of Occupy and UK Uncut. Such 'productivist' conceptions of both capitalism and the possibility of a socialist alternative are commonly associated with Marx. Indeed, Corbyn and his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell are routinely labelled 'Marxists' by the right-wing media. And there are indeed passages of Marx's work which do

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1* (London: Penguin, 1990), p135

¹⁰ On this point, see Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, p11 and 'Critique and Historical Transformation,' *Historical Materialism*, 12.3, 2004 (53-72) p54-55

present capitalist property relations, and the capitalist class as a whole, as an external 'fetter' imposed upon ever-developing forces of production. In this rendition of Marxism, perhaps best expressed in Marx's 1859 *Preface to A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, the contradictions between the forces of production and the restrictive private property relations imposed by the capitalist class will eventually reach such cataclysmic heights that the former will burst through the latter, with communism the result.¹¹

But it seems likely that Corbyn's adoption of this traditional socialist worldview owes as much to the English radical liberal tradition as it does to Marx. The idea of a parasitical, unproductive aristocratic class was a common trope of the radical critique of 'Old Corruption' by industrialist interests, and then extended to those industrialists themselves by the nascent nineteenth century labour movement.¹² Its modern rendition as the 'rigged system' can more immediately be traced back to the Occupy Wall Street movement which emerged in the wake of the 2008 financial crash and subsequent government bailouts. To reduce Occupy's analysis – which achieved hegemonic status amongst the liberal-left in the years following 2008 – to its bare bones, the financial crisis was caused by a chronic imbalance of power between the financial and banking sectors on the one hand, and the 'real' or 'productive' economy on the other. This disparity was the result of three decades of 'neoliberalism,' in which a lack of state regulation of the global financial system had enabled those sectors to make vast amounts of profit from speculation on behalf of the top '1%' – or 'the elite' – at the expense of the other '99%' – or 'the people.'¹³ The 'real economy' which makes actual physical things had been undermined – or 'rigged' – by the power, greed and mathematical trickery of unproductive global financial institutions, for whom money seemed to beget money, apparently of its own accord.¹⁴ The crash was the inevitable, calamitous consequence of allowing the unproductive few to gain the upper hand over the productive many.

A contrast is often drawn in these accounts between this 'casino capitalism,' driven by the speculation of international financiers, and the post-war era of welfare capitalism.¹⁵ During the latter, earlier period, capital controls and the Bretton Woods system meant that capital had far less freedom to roam the globe in search of profits, where the 'real economy' of industry was the 'master' of finance rather than vice versa, and the gap between the '1%' and the rest was much less pronounced.¹⁶ The shift from this form of capitalism – based on mass production and a Keynesian welfare state – to the financialised precarity of 'neoliberalism' in the early 1970s is regarded

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1992) p424-428

¹² Cf Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p90-178

¹³ Ezra Klein, 'Who are the 99%?' *The Washington Post*, 4 October 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/who-are-the-99-percent/2011/08/25/gIQA87jKL_blog.html?utm_term=.67d5c69e7092 [Accessed 9 May 2018]

¹⁴ See, for example, Michael Hudson, *Killing the Host: How Financial Parasites and Debt Destroy the Global Economy*, (Islet, 2015)

¹⁵ Henry Giroux, 'The Mad Violence of Casino Capitalism,' Counterpunch, 19 February 2016, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/02/19/the-mad-violence-of-casino-capitalism/> [Accessed 5 September 2019]

¹⁶ Reuters, 'Big banks must never again be 'master of the economy', John McDonnell to warn,' *The Guardian*, 15 September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/15/john-mcdonnell-financial-crisis-big-banks-must-never-again-be-master-of-the-economy-> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

straightforwardly as the result of the machinations of the rich and powerful. A system of industrial production in which workers received their 'fair share' of wealth had, this analysis suggests, been taken over by a global financial elite in what amounted to a social *coup d'état*, facilitated by international free trade deals and supranational institutions, and distorted in such a way to place profits above social needs.

Given the numerical disparity between the productive 'many' and the unproductive 'few,' this account suggests, the only way the system can retain the 'rigged' character it developed throughout this period is either through direct violence or ideological trickery. Thus in many cases it is not only the political and economic system which is regarded as 'rigged,' but the media too - or the 'mainstream media' (MSM) at least – if not political and civic culture in its entirety. The 'rigged system' as a whole is invariably regarded as monolithic, omnipotent, entirely oppressive, and devoid of contradiction. This can often lend such analyses a conspiratorial edge, even at their most sophisticated.

The fundamental problem with an analysis which contrasts the 'good' capitalism of the past with the 'bad' or immoral capitalism of today is the failure to grasp the internal connections between the two - to recognise that the neoliberal form of capitalism was a response to the *collapse* of the previous mode of mass production and welfare states. As Anselm Jappe puts it, 'The rise of neoliberalism after 1980 was not some devious manoeuvre on the part of the greediest capitalists, nor a *coup d'état* carried out in collusion with smug politicians, as the "radical" left would have it. Neoliberalism was, on the contrary, the only possible way to make the capitalist system last a bit longer.'¹⁷ A critique which focuses only on the evils of 'neoliberalism' or 'finance,' and does not recognise the underlying social dynamic which made the turn from Keynesianism to neoliberalism necessary, has no concept of capital as a mode of social relations at all. It is, precisely, a 'truncated' critique. This critical inadequacy is not merely an academic problem. The way that an object of critique is conceptualised is crucial to the strategies constructed to act upon it. As such, a flawed or partial conceptualisation of capitalism can lead to equally flawed or partial forms of 'anti-capitalism.'

Critiques of capitalism come in many shades, and, as in the case of the 'rigged system' conceit, they are not always emancipatory. It is our contention that a critique which depicts capitalism as a relatively simplistic struggle between a productive people and an unproductive elite, with the former group producing all the wealth and the latter stealing it, is not unambiguously progressive. It contains latent reactionary potential which can, in certain circumstances, be exploited by the right. For this way of seeing and speaking about the world is politically ambivalent. The ease with which notions of 'the people' and 'elites' are able to shift across the political spectrum, increasingly utilised by populist leaders on both the right and the left to both explain and exploit the disintegration of a previously dominant political and economic order, alerts us to a troubling political ambivalence that exposes certain continuities that seem to transcend a simple left-right divide. Without an adequate theoretical framework for grasping the strange, topsy-turvy dynamic of capitalist society, partial forms of anti-capitalism on the left leave themselves open to reactionary or regressive outcomes, including antisemitism, authoritarian nationalism, or fascistic theocracy.

¹⁷ Anselm Jappe, *The Writing on the Wall*, (Alresford: Zero Books, 2016) p70

The national community of the productive

The rigged system conceit is a moveable political feast. The fact that Donald Trump and an array of authoritarian rightwing leaders across the world seem as comfortable railing against 'global elites' in the name of 'the people' as Corbyn, we contend, should raise a warning flag for leftists keen to make such language their own. There is no guarantee that the political benefits of the popular resentment whipped up against a 'cabal' of 'wealth extractors' will accrue to the left.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of the right-wing version of this argument appears in the critique of 'crony capitalism' put forward by former Trump advisor and alt-right figurehead Steve Bannon. For Bannon the post-war consensus embodied a form of 'enlightened capitalism' founded upon local and national communities held together by shared moral values, in which wealth and power was distributed evenly across society.¹⁸ But, as in the Occupy account, this model of 'moral' capitalism was overturned in the 1970s and replaced by a degraded, amoral and 'brutal form of capitalism that is really about creating wealth and creating value for a very small subset of people,' the deracinated global elite. No longer beholden to local communities held together by moral ties, these 'crony capitalists' view themselves as a separate global community more powerful than any single nation state, bounded by 'this elite mentality that they're going to dictate to everybody how the world's going to be run' via free trade agreements and supranational institutions such as the EU and NATO.

Numerous speeches made by Trump during his 2016 Presidential campaign carried clear echoes of this analysis. Trump repeatedly argued that American workers had been 'betrayed' by politicians who 'have aggressively pursued a policy of globalization – moving our jobs, our wealth and our factories to Mexico and overseas.' This decision had 'made the financial elite who donate to politicians very wealthy,' in full knowledge that the consequences for working people would be nothing but 'poverty and heartache.' Trump claimed that the 'people who rigged the system for their benefit will do anything – and say anything – to keep things exactly as they are.' And he left his audience in no doubt who was responsible for this 'rigged system' were – 'Hillary Clinton and her friends in global finance.' He directly invoked Bernie Sanders, Clinton's rival for the Democratic Presidential nomination, quoting the latter's condemnation of Clinton for 'vot[ing] for virtually every trade agreement that has cost the workers of this country millions of jobs.'¹⁹

This vision of a 'rigged system' found powerful expression in Trump's final campaign broadcast, in which he railed against 'a global power structure that is responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class, stripped our country of its wealth, and put that money into the pockets of a handful of large corporations and political entities.' The video featured images of a series of prominent figures in the financial sector, all of them Jewish - George Soros, the Hungarian-American investor,

¹⁸ J Lester Feder, 'This is how Steve Bannon sees the entire world,' *Buzzfeed*, 15 November 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/this-is-how-steve-bannon-sees-the-entire-world> [Accessed 13 May 2018]

¹⁹ Donald Trump, 'Declaring American Economic Independence,' 28 June 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/full-transcript-trump-job-plan-speech-224891> [Accessed 13 May 2018]

Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein, and Janet Yellen, the then-Chair of the Federal Reserve – interspersed with images of shuttered American factories.²⁰

Trump promised to overcome the ‘global power structure’ which had robbed American workers of their birthright through a protectionist programme of economic, political and cultural nationalism. International trade deals would be ripped up, a wall would be built on the border with Mexico, tariffs imposed on imports. As he put it in his Inauguration speech, ‘We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.’ In the three years since Trump’s election victory, this faith in ‘protection’ as the driver of economic prosperity has found expression in the growing number of trade wars kickstarted by the Trump administration, with tariffs imposed on imports from both China and the European Union, stimulating retaliatory protectionist measures in response.

Whilst put to somewhat different purposes and with the overtly racist rhetoric removed, the notion that a fortified nation-state should act as a means of defending a national community of workers from the malicious intrusions of outside forces can be found on the left in Sanders’ and Corbyn’s respective programmes too. Like Trump, Sanders has called for the end of global free trade deals – for which the latter blamed for the loss of ‘millions of decent paying jobs’ in America - and the limiting of immigration, which he argued had resulted ‘in more unemployment and lower wages for American workers’.²¹ Meanwhile, Corbyn settled on a similar programme of economic nationalism, founded on the conviction that nationally produced wealth is being appropriated by extractive global forces. A 2017 report on ‘Alternative Models of Ownership’ commissioned by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell recommended the adoption of a form of municipal protectionism to prevent money ‘sliding away from localities’ which, the report proposed, could be scaled up to the national level underpinned by so-called ‘anchor institutions’ with UK-only procurement policies. It recommended that a Corbyn government should use procurement policy to favour ‘local supply chains’ and national firms, thereby preventing locally- or nationally-produced wealth ‘leaking’ away from its place of origin, or being ‘stolen’ by the international financial sector.²²

This proposed policy platform reproduces in contemporary guise elements of that put forward by Corbyn’s political and personal mentor Tony Benn in the mid-1970s. Benn argued that Britain should construct a ‘siege economy’ in response to the crisis of sterling, supposedly caused by international finance hijacking money that would otherwise be productively invested in the British economy.²³ In Benn’s vision, the British state, workers and trade unions would unite to build a national barrier against ‘the bankers.’

²⁰ Donald Trump, ‘Donald Trump’s Argument for America,’ *YouTube*, 6 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vST61W4bGm8> [Accessed 13 May 2018]

²¹ Bernie Sanders, ‘Bernie Sanders on Free Trade,’ *On The Issues*, 2016, http://www.ontheissues.org/2016/bernie_sanders_free_trade.htm [Accessed 13 May 2018]; Dylan Matthews, ‘This is a massive effort to attract cheap labor.’ Why Sen. Bernie Sanders is skeptical of guest workers,’ *The Washington Post*, 25 May 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/work/wp/2013/05/25/this-is-a-massive-effort-to-attract-cheap-labor-why-sen-bernie-sanders-is-skeptical-of-guest-workers> [Accessed 13 May 2018]

²² Labour Party, *Alternative Models of Ownership*, 7

²³ Tony Benn, *Against the Tide. Diaries 1973-76* (London: Hutchinson, 1989) p621

Whilst the situation is somewhat fluid at the time of writing and an attempt to seize short-term political advantage cannot be discounted, Labour's continuing refusal to unequivocally oppose Brexit can be traced back to this worldview. Before the Labour Party's notorious and ultimately disastrous attempts to navigate the issue electorally, both Corbyn and McDonnell argued that the mutually-agreed limits imposed on 'state aid' to national industries by membership of the European Single Market mean that Labour should push for 'Lexit' – leaving both the Single Market and Customs Union in order to pursue a form of state-driven 'socialism in one country,' as well as ending the free movement of European workers to Britain which, in McDonnell's view, 'drives down wages' of domestic workers. Indeed, in the months immediately following the vote to leave the European Union, McDonnell echoed Brexiteer arguments by asserting that opposing Brexit would place Labour 'on the side of certain corporate elites, who have always had the British people at the back of the queue.' This message ran through Labour's 2018 'Build It In Britain' campaign, which promised to repatriate the 'thousands of jobs' the Conservative government 'have sent overseas.'²⁴ The implication was that Labour intends to restore the glories of a lost golden age of British industry through a protectionist programme of national renewal which will throw off the restrictions imposed by the EU, international finance and global trade.

There are clearly any number of substantive political and ideological differences between Trump, on the one side, and Corbyn and Sanders on the other, and as such it would be facile to conflate them into a single object of critique. Trump evidently has no plans to 'democratise' economic production, redistribute wealth nor strengthen the hand of trade unions, and his resistance to so-called 'socialism' is implacable. Nor do Corbyn or Sanders demonise migrants (beyond their supposedly negative effect on domestic wages), people from Muslim-majority countries, or whip up their supporters with explicitly racist speeches and tweets. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences, their respective political and economic programmes share a common formal basis in a depiction of contemporary society in which a unified, productive, moral community of 'the people' is under threat from predatory, immoral and unproductive global forces, who are acting on that community from without, intent on distorting its inherent harmony. Likewise, in each case it is the nation-state which is given the responsibility of identifying the individuals, institutions, states and forces who are undermining the productive community by draining it of its wealth and power, and then construct the barriers necessary to protect those on the 'inside' from external threats. For Corbyn, Sanders and Trump alike, the solution to the problems afflicting contemporary capitalist societies rests on the nation-state's ability to ensure that locally-produced wealth no longer leaves the borders of its given community. From the critical Marxian perspective we take here, in each case the abstract side of capitalism is here 'concretised' in the form of particular 'unproductive' individuals and groups, who are attributed the intangible global power which is, in reality, the result of capitalist social relations as a whole.

The content of the productive, moral community, the 'we' which is to be protected within the border against the 'them', changes from political context to context, with more or less emphasis placed on that community's national, ethnic, social or racial character. When it comes to immigration, for example, right-wing versions are focused as much, if not more, on the supposed cultural corrosion from outsiders as the

²⁴ Labour Party, 'Build It In Britain,' *YouTube*, 4 September 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze_pa1RCW1s [Accessed 16 January 2019]

purported economic threats to domestic wages or jobs which are the primary target of the left. Nevertheless, in formal terms, this narrative of 'us' and 'them,' of a rooted, productive 'people' against a global, footloose 'elite,' has become hegemonic across the world on both right and left in the post-crash era. It stands in direct opposition to the panegyrics to globalization, open markets, free trade and the free movement of capital and, at times, the free movement of labour around the world that characterised the 'neoliberal' era – an era which, it now seems abundantly clear, ended in 2008.

Two-campism and anti-imperialism

As stated at the outset, in and of itself, arguing that contemporary capitalist society is a 'rigged system' imposed upon a unified moral community by a global 'elite' is not antisemitic. However, it is not difficult to see the parallels between contemporary narratives on both left and right about 'globalism' undermining national communities, and early twentieth century antisemitic conspiracy theories such as the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' which purported to reveal a plot for world domination concocted by a secret international cabal of Jews and freemasons devoid of loyalty to any nation state or settled community. Today such theories often come in the form of claims that the Rothschild banking family have been 'pulling the strings' behind the scenes of any number of historic events, from the two World Wars to economic crises, or that the Hungarian-American Jewish financier and liberal philanthropist George Soros is the mastermind of a secret global conspiracy to open borders, increase migration and undermine national communities.

On the hard right, this is expressed through theories of a 'great replacement,' in which a secret global cabal – sometimes explicitly presented as Jewish - are intent on importing millions of people from Arab countries in order to 'replace' white people in Europe and the USA, carries similar resonances.²⁵ On the left, antisemitic myths about the Rothschilds controlling Wall Street appeared within the outer limits of the Occupy movement, while the prevalence of similar conspiracies within Corbyn's support base is of such a level that Momentum, the organisation set up specifically to defend his leadership within the Labour Party, were forced to release a video in March 2019 attempting to combat the most pernicious.²⁶ Corbyn himself, of course, infamously defended a graffiti artist who had painted a mural depicting hook-nosed bankers counting money on the backs of the world's poor.²⁷ There is thus at the very least a *potential* connection between antisemitism and a worldview in which global forces are regarded as undermining rooted local communities, 'rigging' a productive society that would otherwise work for the good of all.

²⁵ Rosa Schwartzburg, 'The 'white replacement theory' motivates alt-right killers the world over,' *The Guardian*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/great-replacement-theory-alt-right-killers-el-paso> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

²⁶ Spencer Sunshine, 'The right hand of Occupy Wall Street: from libertarians to nazis, the fact and fiction of right-wing involvement,' *Lib Com*, 23 June 2014, <https://libcom.org/library/right-hand-occupy-wall-street-libertarians-nazis-fact-fiction-right-wing-involvement-spe> [Accessed 6 September 2019]; Momentum, 'Rothschild Conspiracy Exposed,' *YouTube*, 4 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFGjIEcvP7Q> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

²⁷ Marcus Dysch, 'Did Jeremy Corbyn back artist whose mural was condemned as antisemitic?,' *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 November 2015, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/did-jeremy-corbyn-back-artist-whose-mural-was-condemned-as-antisemitic-1.62106> [Accessed 5 September 2019]

The antisemitic potential of seeing the world as 'rigged' also finds expression where that 'rigging' is understood through the prism of an all-determining 'imperialism,' a concept which has been the driving force behind the political activity of Corbyn and his circle for a number of decades. Here the activity of the United States of America and its allies – with a particular focus on Israel – is regarded as being the primary, if not the sole, source of all suffering and oppression in the world. In this reading the 'rigged system' is imposed on a world which would otherwise live in harmony by the foreign policies of the US and Israeli actions in the Middle East. Such a viewpoint centres also on the aforementioned characterisation of neoliberalism as an externally-imposed distortion of an essentially benign productive community via theories of the 'Washington Consensus' – or in its more modern form, the 'shock doctrine' – in which the US and its allies stand accused of provoking wars in order to impose capitalist exploitation upon recalcitrant societies.²⁸ Corbyn provided a succinct summary of this position in a 1991 article, arguing that 'the aim of the war machine of the United States is to maintain a world order dominated by the banks and multinational companies of Europe and North America.'²⁹

The typical contours of such an 'anti-imperialist' imaginary cast Israel either as the primary representative of US imperialist power in the Middle East, or in more extreme versions, the dominant party, with the actions of the US and its allies being ultimately determined by the demands of the 'Zionists' and the 'Israel lobby.'³⁰ 'Zionism' itself – at root the belief in Jewish national self-determination – is invariably presented as a form of racism, with the founding of a state of Israel thereby 'a racist endeavour.' This is in contrast to Palestinian demands for national self-determination, which are invariably supported by the same groups who condemn Zionism regardless of their political content or the political character of the organisations who make them. The critique of Zionism as inherently racist is not then part of a general critique of nationalism *per se* – although even here, given the history of the twentieth century, we might query a particular focus on Jewish nation-statehood within a general critique – but arises from the pitting of one national 'people' who are regarded as indigenous, authentic and legitimate against another deemed illegitimate, artificial and invasive. The demonisation of the 'abstract' in the name of the 'concrete' that we see in productivist critiques of capitalism is here replicated, in a somewhat different form, on the geopolitical stage.

The equation of Zionism with racism was the central sticking point in the 2018 dispute over Labour's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association's definition and illustrative examples of antisemitism. Corbyn and his supporters argued that describing the founding of a State of Israel as 'a racist endeavour' might be deemed necessary in the pursuit of Palestinian rights, and should not be classed as antisemitic.³¹ To this end, during the wrangling over the definition, activists stuck up

²⁸ See, for example, Christopher Dolan, *Making the World Safe for Capitalism: How Iraq Threatened the US Economic Empire and had to be Destroyed* (London: Pluto, 2012). Cf Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 2008).

²⁹ Peter Dominiczak, 'Jeremy Corbyn: 9/11 was 'manipulated'', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 2015, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/Jeremy_Corbyn/11892383/Jeremy-Corbyn-911-was-manipulated.html [Accessed 6 September 2019]

³⁰ Cf. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (London: Penguin, 2008)

³¹ Ash Sarkar, 'The IHRA definition of antisemitism is a threat to free expression,' *The Guardian*, 3 September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/03/ihra-antisemitism-labour-palestine> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

posters across London declaring that 'Israel is a racist endeavour.'³² Both the definition and examples were eventually accepted in full by the party, although not before Corbyn made a personal last-ditch intervention arguing that it should not 'be regarded as antisemitic to describe Israel, its policies or the circumstances around its foundation as racist because of their discriminatory impact, or to support another settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict' – the latter point implying, it would appear, the future dismantling of the Israeli state.³³

Such forms of geopolitical analysis are not content with the articulation of legitimate and entirely necessary criticism of the very real forms of oppression that have resulted from American foreign policy or Israel's occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza. Rather, in a hangover from a leftist Cold War mindset in which Soviet 'anti-imperialism' was supported as a flawed but nevertheless vital alternative to American 'imperialism' – with the reality of the Soviet Union's own extensive empire conveniently ignored - it seeks to portray any form of opposition to 'imperialism' as being, at root, inherently emancipatory. The anti-hegemonic character of all 'anti-imperialist' resistance is axiomatic, regardless of the indiscriminate violence of its means or the reactionary, antisemitic or indeed imperialistic political and social content of the states and movements involved. In this way the agency of those living within an 'anti-imperialist' state, as well as its internal political and economic divisions, is wiped out. Instead of a concrete analysis of the multiple tensions and contradictions within and between conflicting societies, complex political, economic and territorial disputes are reduced to a simplistic binary of 'oppressor' and 'oppressed,' in which whatever political action is taken by the most powerful factions within the 'oppressed' society, including indiscriminate violence or fierce internal oppression, is automatically justified as a rational response to the crimes of the imperialists. Carrying the baggage of such an intellectual constitution, Corbyn has attracted criticism for his seeming willingness extol the virtues of Hamas, the authoritarian and reactionary Islamist movement in charge of Gaza and primarily responsible for the wave of suicide bombings of civilian targets in Israel during the Second Intifada, describing the group as 'dedicated towards the good of the Palestinian people and bringing about long-term peace and social justice and political justice in the whole region.'³⁴

Research suggests that the overwhelming majority of Jewish people in Britain uphold the legitimacy of the state of Israel, however fierce their criticisms of any particular Israeli government or the occupation may be.³⁵ One result of a Manichean 'two campism' depicting Israel as an illegitimate 'settler colonial' state with no right to existence but all the blame for the woes of the Middle East, and Zionism as a form of racism, is that those holding a different view are presented as political enemies excluded from the left – even, in some cases, willing accomplices to the imperialist 'rigging' of the system itself. This often leads to Jewish leftists in the UK (and

³² Tom Powell, 'Posters claiming 'Israel is a racist endeavour' appear at London bus stops and are being investigated by police,' *Evening Standard*, 5 September 2018, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/outrage-as-posters-claiming-israel-is-a-racist-endeavour-spring-up-at-london-bus-stops-a3928681.html> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

³³ Dan Sabbagh, 'Labour adopts IHRA antisemitism definition in full,' *The Guardian*, 4 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/04/labour-adopts-ihra-antisemitism-definition-in-full> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

³⁴ Sampaix, 'Jeremy Corbyn on Hamas and Hezbollah,' *YouTube*, 31 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5mmJQ5NXXc> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

³⁵ Stephen Miller, Margaret Harris, Colin Shindler, 'The Attitudes of British Jews Towards Israel,' Department of Sociology School of Arts and Social Sciences City University London

increasingly in the US and elsewhere) being forced to pass a 'litmus test' on the issue – in effect coerced into publicly renouncing Israel and the concept of Jewish national self-determination altogether - before they are allowed to join what David Hirsh has described as the 'community of the good.'³⁶ The consequence is that Jewish leftists within the Labour Party who do not fit into what Corbyn's has termed the 'Jewish tradition that I'm interested in, [that] I understand' – i.e. anti-Zionist Jews – and who have criticised Corbyn and his supporters for their rhetoric and political alliances on the issue of Israel and Palestine, have found themselves regularly portrayed as disaffected right-wingers, 'neoliberals,' and imperialists.³⁷ They are accused of confecting claims of antisemitism in order to both undermine Corbyn's domestic agenda and to deflect criticism of the Israeli state.

This has on occasion assumed the status of a kind of 'loyalty pledge' which Jews, and only Jews, are required to make before they are accepted within the left, playing on the same historical trope of split loyalties Donald Trump has deployed, albeit in inverse form, in recent statements about the relationship of US Jews to Israel.³⁸ Indeed, this link was made plain by the circulation of a 'loyalty pledge' to Labour MPs by grassroots web activists in the wake of complaints about the antisemitic abuse of a Jewish Labour MP, Luciana Berger, by activists in her local constituency party.³⁹ Berger faced such levels of animosity both online and from Labour members that she had to be provided with police protection at the 2018 Labour party conference. Shortly after speaking out publicly about the antisemitic abuse she had received – and how she had discovered that the party had not informed her about violent threats made against her – a motion of no confidence was put forward in her constituency Labour party, on the basis that 'our MP is continually using the media to criticise the man we all want to be prime minister.' One of the members who had proposed the motion had previously described Berger as a 'disruptive Zionist.'⁴⁰ The motion was eventually withdrawn, but not before Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell had effectively backed it by appearing on national radio calling for Berger 'to just put this issue to bed — to say very clearly, 'no I am not supporting another party, I'm not jumping ship'. Apparently stimulated by McDonnell's demand for such a pledge of loyalty from Berger, the grassroots-led loyalty pledge was, somewhat surprisingly even in the context of contemporary events, signed and promoted by a series of Shadow Cabinet members.⁴¹ On such occasions the firewall

³⁶ David Hirsh, 'The Corbyn left: the politics of position and the politics of reason,' *Fathom*, Autumn 2015, <http://fathomjournal.org/the-corbyn-left-the-politics-of-position-and-the-politics-of-reason/> [Accessed 5 September 2019]

³⁷ Daniel Sugarman, 'Corbyn's aides interceded to reinstate 'Jews in gutter' activist Glyn Secker,' *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/corbyn-s-aides-interceded-to-help-jews-in-gutter-activist-glyn-secker-1.484093> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

³⁸ New York Times Editorial Board, 'Mr Trump, Stop Questioning the Loyalty of American Jews'. *New York Times*, 21 August 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/opinion/trump-jews-disloyal.html> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

³⁹ Christopher Hope 'Moderate Labour MPs object over pressure to sign up to 'Great Leader Jeremy Corbyn' pledge card,' *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/02/17/moderate-labour-mps-object-pressure-sign-great-leader-jeremy/> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

⁴⁰ JC Reporter, 'Luciana Berger called 'disruptive Zionist' by Labour member proposing no confidence motion in her,' *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 February 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/luciana-berger-called-disruptive-zionist-by-labour-member-proposing-no-confidence-motion-in-her-1.479721> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

⁴¹ Jim Pickard, 'John McDonnell criticised for seeking 'loyalty pledge' from Jewish MP,' *Financial Times*, 8 February 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/1434fe9e-2b95-11e9-88a4-c32129756dd8> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

between the swelling mass of social media conspiracy theorists on whom successive scandals have centred, and the intellectual and political leadership responsible for setting the policy and governmental agenda for the party, seems to fade away. The supposed minority of so-called 'cranks' can be an all-too-convenient alibi preventing introspection at the top of the party.⁴²

Conspiracy theory and personalised critique

The two strands of antisemitism latent (although by no means inevitable) within the 'rigged system' conceit – one focusing on the secret power of international networks of financiers and bankers, the other on Israel's role as the leading representative of imperialism – come together in claims that a 'Zionist lobby' seeks to control nation-states through the power of money, finance and the assertion of an undue and uniquely malevolent secretive influence on politicians and state officials. Within Labour, MPs and activists of Jewish background critical of Corbyn's past behaviour, statements and alliances have faced accusations of working at the behest of the Israeli embassy, and in one case even of being a CIA agent.⁴³ A persistent reference point for such accusations is a thoroughly debunked Al Jazeera documentary series entitled *The Lobby* purporting to show that the issue of antisemitism within Labour has been cynically whipped up by those working for, or under the influence of, the Israeli state.⁴⁴ Opening with the declaration that it demonstrates 'how the Israeli embassy penetrates different levels of British democracy,' *The Lobby* primarily consisted of undercover footage of Jewish activists, MPs and members of the Labour Friends of Israel organisation shot at the 2016 Labour conference. One young Jewish Labour activist was secretly filmed in tears after a confrontation with Jackie Walker, a former leading member of Momentum who has accused Jews of being the 'chief financiers of the [trans-Atlantic] slave and sugar trade' – a conspiracy theory originating with the Nation of Islam.⁴⁵ The documentary suggested that those featured were being directed and funded by an 'Israel lobby' to undermine Corbyn and those campaigning for Palestinian rights, as well as fabricating complaints of antisemitism. As the Corbyn-supporting website *The Canary* put it, the documentary showed that 'Israel put up a £1,000,000 bounty for Labour insiders to undermine Corbyn.'⁴⁶

This persistent myth posits a monetary link between individuals and their interests, substantiating the target of the personalised critique of capitalism that lies at the heart

⁴² Jade Azim, 'The real battle for Labour's soul? Lansmanites vs cranks,' *Labour List*, 8 August 2018, <https://labourlist.org/2018/08/the-real-battle-for-labours-soul-lansmanites-vs-cranks/> [Accessed 5 September 2019]

⁴³ Robert Stevens, 'The murky world of the UK's Blairite anti-Corbyn coup plotters,' *World Socialist Web Site*, 26 July 2016, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/07/22/smee-j22.html> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

⁴⁴ Al Jazeera, 'The Lobby,' *Al Jazeera*, 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/> [Accessed 6 September 2019]; Rosa Doherty, 'If you're using Al Jazeera's 'The Lobby' to defend Labour, you're another conspiracy theorist,' *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 July 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/al-jazeera-the-lobby-labour-antisemitism-israel-conspiracy-theorists-1.486494> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

⁴⁵ Joe Mulhall, 'Jackie Walker, the left and antisemitism,' *Hope Not Hate*, 29 September 2016, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/09/29/jackie-walker-left-antisemitism/> [Accessed 5 September 2019]

⁴⁶ Kerry-anne Mendoza, 'Israel put up a £1,000,000 bounty for Labour insiders to undermine Corbyn,' 28 March 2018, <https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2018/03/28/reminder-israel-put-up-a-1000000-bounty-for-labour-insiders-to-undermine-corbyn/> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

of the 'rigged system' conceit in which guilty individuals are identified and blamed for the evils of the world. The ascription of wealth, or a desire for it, to those for whom there is no room in the 'community of the good' is a recurring theme of Corbynist political rhetoric. As the increasingly critical but initially Corbyn-supporting journalist Paul Mason once put it, Corbynism in its early stages was motivated by a perception that 'the final defence line of the 1%' lies 'inside the Labour Party', among the Blairite rump of the PLP.⁴⁷ Throughout Corbyn's leadership those who have spoken out against antisemitism in particular have time and again found themselves depicted as the representatives of 'the few' intent on doing whatever it takes to undermine the victory of 'the many.' In June 2019, to give one relatively mild but telling example, the Corbynite MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle suggested that Margaret Hodge, a longstanding Labour MP of Jewish background, was criticising Corbyn over antisemitism due to a decades-old 'vendetta' against the Labour left. Russell-Moyle tweeted that Hodge's true motivation was she 'want[ed] to roll out more neo-liberalism and austerity on our country.'⁴⁸

As noted above, elements of the Corbyn movement have sought to distance themselves from the more extreme renditions of conspiracy theories associating Jewishness with wealth or acquisitiveness. This critique, voiced in videos and web resources produced and promoted through the Labour Party and the pro-Corbyn campaign group Momentum, is based on the notion that conspiracy theories about the power of 'the Rothschilds' arise from a kind of accounting error, in which Jews are erroneously thought to own more banks or hold more power than they actually do in reality. Here antisemitism is portrayed as a direct result of the efforts of those who do in fact hold power to disguise that fact. Antisemitism is regarded as an ideological narrative constructed by capitalists and powerful political forces to deflect attention from their activity. Antisemitism is thus understood as function of elite or capitalist power, with Jews the subject of a consciously designed 'scapegoat' ideology which falsely accuses them of bearing responsibility for the world's evils.

There is no doubt that powerful groups have and continue to use the spectre of Jewish power in this way, as demonstrated by the eagerness with which virtually every contemporary far-right politician, from Trump to Farage, pours vitriol on George Soros clearly demonstrates. But to leave the analysis of antisemitism at this functional level is to risk erasing the specificities of antisemitism and replacing it with an abstract universalism, in the sense that reducing antisemitism to a scapegoat ideology makes it interchangeable with any other mode of ideology. The particular characteristics of antisemitism – the association of Jews with shadowy, omnipotent power, with finance, banking and money – are treated as contingent constructs which could, in theory, be applied to any other scapegoated group should it be more beneficial for the 'true' elites to do so. The 'scapegoat' approach therefore relegates antisemitism to a secondary question by making the central political and intellectual task uncovering the 'real' motivations behind it, rather than remaining focused on the issue of antisemitism itself.

⁴⁷ Paul Mason, 'Corbyn: the summer of hierarchical things,' *Medium*, 26 July 2016, <https://medium.com/mosquito-ridge/corbyn-the-summer-of-hierarchical-things-ab1368959b80> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

⁴⁸ Lee Harpin, 'Labour MP branded a 'disgrace' for saying Dame Margaret Hodge pursuing 'vendetta' against Jeremy Corbyn,' *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 June 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/labour-mp-branded-a-disgrace-for-saying-dame-margaret-hodge-pursuing-vendetta-against-jeremy-cor-1.485240> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

It fails to comprehend the deep-rooted and multifarious presence of antisemitism within human societies across centuries, and thus has no explanation for its *availability* as an ideological narrative, or the continuing power of its appeal.

Nor can the notion of antisemitism as a top-down ideology easily explain the often obsessional focus on Israel and Zionism within leftist movements, nor the 'litmus test' applied to Jewish leftists, precisely because these tendencies appear to be most prevalent amongst those groups otherwise highly critical of capitalist power, imperialism and American foreign policy. To this end, it is notable that in their attempts to get to grips with the issue and provide some intellectual leadership to the wayward rank and file of the Corbyn movement, Momentum have made no effort to combat depictions of Israel as a wholly illegitimate 'settler colonial' state, nor the idea of Zionism as an inherently racist, imperial project. Nor have they issued any criticism of Corbyn's history of support for antisemitic individuals and groups, much of which occurred in the context of his pro-Palestinian advocacy.

This absolute separation of Rothschild conspiracy theories – regarded as ideologically-driven antisemitic scapegoating - from the question of Israel as a uniquely 'racist endeavour' – seen as legitimate leftist critique - demonstrates how treating antisemitism solely as an instrument consciously wielded by powerful groups allows leftists to reassure themselves that antisemitism is something alien imposed upon them by their political opponents through ideological trickery. There is therefore no need to grapple with the uncomfortable possibility that antisemitic worldviews – including the belief that Jewish national self-determination is uniquely malign - might not be simply the result of conscious manipulation by those in power, but rather possess an objective basis in society itself. The idea that antisemitism might have an intrinsic, rather than merely extrinsic, relationship to the organisation of contemporary society as a whole, opens up the possibility that antisemitism may penetrate even those perspectives which, while developed in opposition to that society, nevertheless carry something of that society within themselves. The oft-stated idea on the Labour left that identifying as 'anti-racist' is enough to inoculate leftists from the power of this narrative is therefore a comforting fallacy. As both Moishe Postone and David Hirsh have argued, it is precisely because antisemitism is often presented as an emancipatory response to oppression that it is so seductive.⁴⁹ This pseudo-emancipatory character is one reason why allegations of antisemitism on the left are routinely dismissed as right-wing 'smears.' The result is a kind of left-right pincer movement, in which Jewish people are attacked from the right for undermining the nation, and the left for undermining the struggle for socialism, liberation and world peace. In both cases the particularity of Jewish history is regarded as a threat to the universalistic aspirations of the productive community.

Left antisemitism cannot, then, be simply explained as the mistaken attribution of the totalising repressive power supposedly held by the global 'bourgeoisie' or 'crony capitalists' to global Jewry, a conflation of anti-capitalist and antisemitic 'discourses' deliberately produced by the capitalist class through acts of ideological misdirection aimed at confusing workers. Such a 'discursive' approach to the issue has been put

⁴⁹ Postone, 'History and Helplessness.' David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2017)

forward by the cultural theorist Jeremy Gilbert.⁵⁰ But the point is that no individual or group holds such totalising power in capitalist societies. Rather it is *capital* as a social relation which is the abstract, intangible force determining the contours of the lives of all who live through it, rich and poor. To the extent that 'crony capitalism' exists today, it is an *effect* of the historical development of the capital relation, rather than the its cause. Left antisemitism springs, at least in part, from precisely this failure to grasp the determinate power of the abstract, intangible side of capitalist social relations, and the compensatory effort to 'concretise' its effects through the identification and vilification of individuals, groups and states held to be personally responsible. Facing up to this is the beginning of any serious attempt to confront antisemitism from within the political and intellectual culture of the British Labour Party itself, and the wider left of which it is an increasingly interconnected part.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that personalised or truncated critiques of capitalism appear in different forms, on both the right and left. What unites them is the absence of any theoretical concept of capital, and a blindness to the systemic compulsions and imperatives which underpin capitalist society. The form of abstract, impersonal social domination which distinguishes capitalist societies from every other form of society throughout history is conceptually erased, while its effects are explained entirely through the will of the various actors. It is our contention that reducing an analysis of capitalism to the question of intentional malign behaviour by particular groups or individuals is not adequate to the task of comprehending either the historical development of capitalist society over the past century, not the crisis-ridden character of present moment. Moreover, it feeds a paranoid and conspiratorial mindset, on left and right alike, which continually searches for individuals and groups who can be personally blamed for the current malaise. It suggests that if only that malign and unproductive few could be identified and prevented from 'rigging' the system, society could find its feet once more.

The identification of individuals and groups to blame for capitalism's ills might well seem wise political positioning at a time of crisis and upheaval. But there is political danger in its avoidable conclusion in the kind of conspiratorial view of capitalism that has characterised those quarters of the Corbyn movement most susceptible to the reproduction of antisemitic tropes and frames. The impossibility of locating in individuals or groups the totalising and omnipotent power underpinning a society completely shaped by capital is a recipe for a dangerous and ever-mounting frustration. In this respect the 'rigged society' conceit tends to exceed the rhetorical purposes to which it is put in specific campaigns. Once the airwaves are won, it implies as a platform for government the search for culprits from whom this impossible power can somehow be wrested, control taken back and the system 'de-rigged' to the benefit of all. But the case will never be closed on these culprits, because the locus of this power cannot and will not be identified in individual or collective human actors. This

⁵⁰ Jeremy Gilbert, 'Antisemitism, cosmopolitanism and the politics of Labour's 'old' and 'new' right-wings,' *Open Democracy*, April 14 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/jeremy-gilbert/antisemitism-cosmopolitanism-and-politics-of-labour-s-old-and-new-right-wings> [Accessed 6 September 2019]

produces unsustainable notions of what it is possible to do to remedy capitalism's ills. The domestic agenda Labour presented in the recent election campaign may well have alleviated many of the worst cruelties imposed by nearly a decade of Tory-led administrations through innovative and sophisticated policies on corporate governance, public ownership and workplace democracy. But it is unwise to claim that these reforms can bring to a halt the crisis-ridden development of capital, apprehending in neither thought nor practice the contradictions at the core of capitalist society.

Without any conception of the abstract forms which unavoidably mediate the existence of both rich and poor in that society, the spread of such analyses can feed into a conspiratorial and potentially antisemitic mindset all the more dangerous for its self-identification as emancipatory and anti-hegemonic. When such a position is combined with a fetishization of the 'real economy,' and the belief that state borders and national sovereignty protect the productive community from the clutches of transnational finance or foreign powers, the path is laid for a reactionary turn should things not go to plan. Far from 'de-rigging' the system, unfulfillable proposals for national renewal through repatriating jobs and rejuvenating industries portend only a dangerous disappointment. With their failure, blame will fall on the groups or individuals deemed responsible. This is an uncomfortable prospect for those – like the majority of Jewish people who fall outside the anti-Zionist tradition which Corbyn is 'interested in' - who already find themselves accused of standing on the 'wrong side of history.' Moreover, the depiction of a unified, hardworking people being manipulated by a global elite only needs a nationalist inflection to lend legitimacy to similar standpoints on the far right. Challenging left antisemitism is therefore not only crucial for its own sake, but is one of the most important ways to minimize the risk of some future spectrum-spanning political configuration based on the shared illusion of a sphere of 'real production' that demands political protection by the nation-state. It requires, as a necessary if insufficient step, an adequate conceptualisation of capital as a social relation, as a historically-specific form of social mediation which truncated critiques of all forms leave untouched. The consequences for practical political action flow from this theoretical jumping-off point, and not the other way around.

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